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Writing translation: On the question of 'Writing Back' in post-colonial translation

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Abstract

Languages have many functional roles with regard to their social and cultural position. Hence, unless the contextualization of linguistic constructions is successfully processed, the cultural features of any community will remain inaccessible. Accordingly, many Indian and African writers have chosen the language of the colonizer as a medium of expression, for they wanted their voice to be heard outside the borders of their country and even because they are not competent enough to use their mother tongue in their writings. On this basis, their use of the colonial language is not considered as a manifestation of the French or English assimilation process which by definition stresses the superiority of the colonizer and his culture over the colonized. The purpose of this study is to show the extent to which the usage of the colonizer's language reflects an act of translation, as it strives to make the experience of the local people known and readable for the colonizer. Said's theory of orientalism allowed to explore the different mechanisms deployed by the colonizer to implant the idea of subordination in the minds of colonized people, especially through the imposition of his language.

Keywords: colonizer, cultural translation, hegemony, language, post-colonial

Public Interest Statement

As my interest in intercultural communication is huge, I believe that cultures should interact with each other through a reciprocal exchange of ideas. The nourishment of stereotypes and prejudgments about a given community may increase cultural clashes and conflicts around the world. The call for peace should be based on mutual understanding and dialogue. Translation must be employed in this sense to put this concept into action. A fruitful interaction between cultures thereby goes through the exchange of perspectives without any kind of political control. The deliberate underrepresentation of cultures tend to widen the gap between communities and increase the level of misconceptions.

Introduction

Whether to write in the native language or in the colonizer's is a huge debate. It is believed that using the master's tools is effective to dismantle his projects. It's a strategy which allows post-colonial writers to become aware of both traditions through mastering the colonizer's language and having other languages to defend their point. The colonizer's language becomes nothing more than a vehicle which facilitates the transfer of the different issues that preoccupy the post-colonial writer's mind. Seen from this perspective, the colonial language becomes a great power that postcolonial scholars possess, as they can mobilize knowledge from different traditions in order to challenge the assumptions being made about their culture. This is because the colonial language as a means of expression is seen as an act of translation with the aim of having a global impact. Many post-colonial writers write using the colonizer's language to resist the predominant Western discourse. This specific usage of language experiences new mechanisms of expression, as Indian and African writers employ English or French as a means of expression to write about Indian and African people. For example, Indian English writers use English as a language of expression in order to write about their own community. Hence, the Englishness of the language fades away because they tend to bring Indian linguistic systems to English. I believe that this process is an act of translation which makes use of the colonial language to communicate the local cultural features with the western readership.

The use of the colonizer's language as an act of translation

The language of the colonizer becomes a medium of expression, for they want their voice to be heard outside the borders of their country and even because they are not competent enough to use their mother tongue in their writings. Thus, their use of the colonial language does not reflect their subordination to the center. Accordingly, for post-colonial writers to have a large audience and even to make their point a global one, they opt for a language which is read and understood worldwide. Wa Thiong'o supports those who prefer to write in their local languages because it helps preserve the local cultural tradition. In Wa Thiong'o's (1986) opinion, African writers are invited to stick to their national languages as a strategy to defy the colonizer's plans. This resistance that language can exert refers in the first place to the different roles that any language can play within its community. The most important of these roles resides in constructing the mind patterns of its speakers through affecting their thoughts and how they conceptualize themselves and others. This role discussed by Wa Thiong'o (1986) reveals that there is a correlation between one's awareness of himself and of other factors that constitute his reality:

The choice of language and the use to which language is put is central to a people's definition of themselves in relation to their natural and social environment, indeed in relation to the entire universe. (Wa Thiong'o, 1986, p. 4)

Given this impact of language on the minds of people, the colonizer wanted to control the acts and behaviors of colonized people by changing how they think and what they value. Different are the ways through which the colonizer managed to maintain control over the colonized among which we find the language. This control is the result of reducing the colonized to a subject of knowledge with the aim of understanding him and proposing practical methods to predict his actions and reactions. With regard to Robert J. C. Young (2004, p. 62), "in Western philosophy, when knowledge or theory comprehends the other, then the alterity of the latter vanishes as it becomes part of the same". Imposing a language on the Other is therefore an elimination of his otherness by making him understandable and accessible. Suppressing the right of others to exist and have their imagined territory was part of a global colonial strategy to concretize the presence of colonial forces. It is a strategy that aims at eradicating any feature capable of tracing the cultural history of the locals. When the dominated internalizes his sense of inferiority, it becomes easy for the dominant to exploit him at all levels without having to invest in material forces. Viswanathan (1989), in this respect, argues that the deliberate introduction of English literature in Indian schools was one of the ways by which English forces wanted to maintain their control over India. The deliberate destruction of the local cultural heritage addresses the mental processes of the colonized in the sense to destabilize his self-confidence and get him to doubt his notion of himself as someone who is free to choose and free to think. It is a cultural invasion which tends to dehumanize the colonized through reducing him to a primitive individual who is unable to catch up with the Western level of civilization. The underrepresentation of the local culture serves to convince the colonized of his destiny as an underdeveloped creature trapped in chaos and barbarism. This hegemonic practice is done through understanding the Other before adjusting the tools to possess him as a subject of knowledge. Having explored the colonized in terms of his mind patterns and culture, the colonizer gets to control him simply because "To control a people's culture (and language) is to control their tools of self-definition in relationship to others" (Wa Thiong'o, 1994, p. 442).

It is beyond doubt that deploying the colonizer's language is an ideological apparatus that brings readymade perspectives about the world to the colonized realm. The local people are therefore made to internalize the colonizer's culture as superior and worthy of praise, as it represents the superior Other. The imposition of the colonial language is then a hegemonic practice which helps perpetuating colonialism at least in the minds of people. To this end, colonialism is an idea that came to assure a permanent stay within the physical and mental territory of the colonized. As a form of resistance to all these maneuvers, Wa Thiong'o (1986) denies any utility of adopting the colonial language as a language of expression due to the violence it exerts on the local culture of people. Similarly, "Post-colonial theorists have pointed out that language is deeply implicated in the continuing colonization of the world by Euro-Western ways of being and thinking" (Gandhi, 1998, Loomba, 1998). The introduction of the colonial language is therefore a way to root up the natives out of their own identity through portraying what is local as not worthy of respect and all what belongs to the colonizer as great:

When we consider the efforts made to carry out the cultural estrangement so characteristic of the colonial epoch, we realize that nothing has been left to chance and that the total result looked for by colonial domination was indeed to convince the natives that colonialism came to lighten their darkness. The effect consciously sought by colonialism was to drive into the natives' heads the idea that if the settlers were to leave, they would at once fall back into barbarism, degradation, and bestiality. (Fanon,

1968, p. 211).

However, the usage of the colonizer's language can be considered as an act of translation which bridges the gap between two different cultures. In this respect, the colonizer's language is used to reinforce the cultural presence of the colonized through making his cultural identity known for the colonized. This form of knowledge differs from the one constructed by the colonizer, as it comes from the colonized himself. This newly constructed knowledge is able to challenge the prevalent assumptions created by the dominant with the aim of subjugating the dominated culturally and mentally. Achebe (1994) stresses the importance that the colonial language has when it comes to serving African literature. He does not urge the locals to mimic the colonizer, but to exploit his language in making the local culture heard and read by the colonizer himself. This way of adopting the colonial language as proposed by Achebe contributes to the creation of a local perspective capable of negotiating the already constructed ideas that reduce the dominant to a field of study. This negotiation is introduced by Bhabha (2000) as an important strategy through which cultural differences boil down to a shared perspective that fits the expectations of both sides: "for it is by living on the borderline of history and language, on the limits of race and gender, that we are in a position to translate the differences between them into a kind of solidarity" (Bhabha, 2000, p. 641).

Indian and African examples, in this sense, are very informative as they show how writing in French or English and using a European genre (the novel) allowed post-colonial writers to employ the colonizer's linguistic and cultural tools to proclaim their renaissance and introduce themselves as writing subjects of their communities. Having chosen the colonial language as a language of expression, post-colonial writers become translators of their own culture in the sense to foster the understandability of their point. Simply put, the colonized captures the master's tools to resist his agendas through the allowance of a local voice to emerge. For Ramone (2011, p. 32) colonial literature "worked to maintain imperialist ideology by implying that colonized subjects were not fit to govern their own societies because they were infantile and undisciplined". However, this function of language can be challenged by the message it intends to convey. It is clear that these writers use the language of the colonizer as a kind of resistance to the western hegemony. Writing in French or English is in other words a sort of counteracting the dominant hegemonic practices of the colonizer as well as narrating the nation. Therefore, writing in French or English is in fact 'writing back' to the center to question the groundless concepts the West constructed about the East. The western hegemony rests upon the superiority of the colonizer's culture over the cultural identity of the colonized:

Said's theory of post colonialism is mainly based on what he considers the false image of the Orient or the east that has been fabricated by western explorers, poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators since Napoleon's occupation of Egypt in 1798. According to Said, these have always shown the Orient as the primitive, uncivilized "other", in an attempt to create it as the contrast to the advanced and civilized West. (Hamadi, 2014, p. 40)

Drawing on Edward Said's theory, the negative representation of the East by the West urged the Eastern educated figures to give an opportunity for the voiceless local people to speak and be heard in the West. From this perspective, using the colonizer's language is a real challenge for the Western reader who becomes a stranger to his own language as he comes across unfamiliar expressions and words. This way of writing is in fact an act of translation which brings the reader to the text

by preserving the local color of the source culture. It is therefore possible to consider post-colonial writings as a sort of information transfer through which the cultural experience of the colonized becomes accessible and readable for the colonizer. In this regard, Maria Tymoczko points out:

In translation studies a distinction is always made between whether to take an audience to the text, or to take a text to an audience, and argues that the same distinction applies also to post-colonial writing. By de-familiarizing the language, post-colonial writers can bring readers face to face with the reality of the difference, and call into question the supremacy of the standard language. (Bassnett & Trivedi, 1999, p. 13).

Tymoczko (Bassnett & Trivedi, 1999) contrasts translation with post-colonial writings through calling into question issues such as translatability and readability. Literary translation as well as post-colonial writing triggers the reader's interpretations, for the textual content is rich and debatable. The impossibility of reaching a final interpretation of the text when reading a post-colonial novel resembles the difficulty translators encounter to attain a final translation of a given text. Tymoczko (Bassnett & Trivedi, 1999) argues that "judgment is inescapable in the process; objectivity is impossible. And just as there can be no final translation, there can be no final interpretation of culture through a literary work. There is no last word." This open-ended nature of the text reduces stereotypes among cultures and allows the reader to read using his/her criticality to reflect on the richness and diversity of other cultures.

Regarding Tymoczko's point, literary translation and post-colonial writings are similar in choosing an aspect to be transposed. In this vein, post-colonial writings are mostly about the problems local people suffer from. The post-colonial writer seizes the colonizer's language to shine light on the margin. On this basis, Ben Jelloun (2004) argues that any literary work is not identified by the language it is written in, but rather by the social issues it deals with. Relatedly, Ben Jelloun argues that he cannot write about French culture, for France is full of great literary figures to write about it. Therefore, every writer is the product of his/her own culture and his/her role is to become the voice of the voiceless and to transmit the social misery of ordinary people showing the level of their exclusion and marginalization. The identity of any writer is therefore found in his works where he/she unconsciously denounces, praises and describes what belongs to him/her and to his/her cultural identity. Ben Jelloun's novel *Racism explained to my daughter* discusses the problem of racism by inviting parents to become more tolerant. This is because Ben Jelloun believes that parents are responsible for racism due to the type of language they usually use with their kids. Racism reveals the extent to which the Western attitudes towards the East are discriminatory and unjust. According to Said (1978), these attitudes resulted from what has been written about the East. Ben Jelloun's usage of the colonizer's language as a means of expression allowed him to make the painful experience of emigrants readable for the French reader.

Translation vs Originality: a new approach to literary translation

As we have seen above, writing in French is an act of translation since the author made the issue of racism readable for the French reader. According to Mukherjee (1971, p. 174), if Indian writers choose to write in English, their writing has to convey the spirit of their social environment and speak in the name of the locals. Accordingly, Prasad (Bassnett & Trivedi, 1999, p. 43) claims that the type of English Indian writers should use is the one that reflects their attachment to their soil. In other words, their use of English has to approximate the speech patterns of their characters. From this perspective,

Indian writers use English as a means of expression to highlight their cultural diversity. For example, Indian English tends to use complex nouns, verb phrases and long sentences. Thus, the Indian writers do not use English the way the British did, for their intention is to convey the Indian spirit to the target reader. Since the natives were taught to trivialize their own language, the use of the colonial language has become a sign of prestige, as it brings the locals close to the civilized world. Phillipson (1992, p. 128) refers to this as a “legacy of linguisticism in which the colonized people have internalized the language and many of the attitudes of their masters, in particular their attitude to the dominant language and the dominated languages”. However, when post-colonial writers choose to write in the colonizer’s language, they do not confine their use of this language to a mere reproduction of the same view that glorifies all what belongs to the colonizer. Conversely, in doing so they challenge the target reader through bringing him/her to the text in a way to introduce him/her to a different form of his/her language. It is a form in which many cultural expressions and linguistic constructions operate together to create a new language within the same language.

Using the colonizer’s language as a means of expression is likely to resist the linguistic imperialism if this language serves as an outer form of expression to transmit what is local. The colonial language if deployed this way can reconstruct the reputation constructed by the colonizer, for it will allow the target reader to revisit his/her assumptions regarding the Other by basing them on things that originate from the natives themselves. These assumptions require revision and rectification due to their discriminatory nature. Linguistic imperialism is in other words discriminatory towards native languages, for it tends to devalue them by introducing them as not worthy of respect: “discrimination based on language that unfairly treats certain linguistic communities, or unfairly advantages some languages over others” (Galloway and Rose 2015, p. 255).

The English Indian writer writes about Indian people and transpose their cultural features in a way to make the English language inaccessible even to the monolingual reader. This is because introducing Indian words makes the process of reading challenging for the target reader. The use of English as means of expression is in fact an act of translation, as it reveals the features of Indian cultures and brings the target reader to the text. Indian English writers resist the hegemonic practices of the colonizer through the originality of their literary production. The literary independence of Indian English writers rests upon the choice of issues that address Indians along with their local environment. This power brought by the colonial language to the literary territory of the colonized is featured by Achebe (1973) who does not deny the gloomy side of the colonizer’s language, however, he invites African writers to direct their focus to the gains they can get from writing in the colonial language.

Mehrez (1992, p. 121) draws attention to the great importance this typical way of writing has in identifying Indian English writers and their language of expression. This writing style tends to create a ‘language in between’ and therefore come to occupy a ‘space in between’. According to Mehrez, this ‘space in between’ is significant in the sense that it decolonizes the Indian writer from his/her Western colonizer. Kachru (1983) explains the challenge that a British English reader may face when reading an Indian English novel as follows:

In English brother, sister, or brother-in law all belong to the lexical set of kinship terms. In (Indian English) extra semantic features are assigned and their range of functions in other lexical sets widened e.g. (+affection), (+ regard), (+abuse), (+mode of address). (Kachru 1983, p. 46).

To comprehend Kachru's words, Prasad (Bassnett & Trivedi, 1999, p.50) says, "The use here of 'sister' as a mode of address for a woman not related to the speaker points to politeness and lack of hostility." Prasad points out that kinship terms can be used differently in Indian English: "for instance, mother as a term of respect, sister of regard, and father-in-law in the sense of abuse". A man can be called a 'father-in-law' / 'brother-in-law' only if the speaker has slept with his daughter/sister and this dishonors the entire family.

Prasad (Bassnett & Trivedi, 1999, p. 50) provides another example, which is an extract from a novel written by Rao (1971, pp. 56-7), it illustrates a collocational deviation in the expression that Venkamma uses when she thanks the 'heavens I didn't tie my daughter to the neck of a pariah-mixer'. Prasad says that the British reader may not expect to find a woman tied to the neck of any one. Prasad points out that this is a common Indian expression which conveys a sense of burden.

Post-colonial writings create serious problems to translators because of the nature of language post-colonial writers use when they transpose their cultural features. Such features of the source culture are often encoded in specific lexical items for which there are no equivalents in the target culture. To cope with this translation problem, translators usually import the word untranslated. The result is that translations have often a different lexical and linguistic construction which sounds strange for the target reader. For example, Tymoczko (1999, p.25) says that in *A Man of the People*, Chinua Achebe also imports African words into English (e.g. Lappa, a garment). Tymoczko (1999, p.26) points out that in Standard English the word 'wife' does not collocate with the first-person plural. The Nigerian custom of multiple wives forces the linguistic variation in his text. For instance, in *A Man of the People* we can provide many examples: "she is our wife" (p. 36), "we are getting a second wife to help me" (p. 36)....."Our new wife" (p. 88)

According to Sherry Simon (Bassnett & Trivedi, 1999, p. 59), translation may be considered as an implicit mode of literary creation in post-colonial writings. From this perspective, Ramanujan (Bassnett & Trivedi, 1999, p. 118) makes a distinction between outer and inner forms of his own practice as a scholar and literary figure. He considers English as his outer form of expression as it provides him with necessary linguistic tools to shape his life experiences. As for his inner form, it refers to his life in India.

When translating from a powerful culture into a less powerful culture translators have to rethink their translation strategies. If translators do not domesticate their translations when translating to a more powerful culture, their translation may be rejected. In other words, the translator needs to leave the reader alone and bring the text or the author to him/her. It is a translation which is characterized by naturalness as it suits the target culture's norms. However, the type of translation this paper is calling for is the one which brings the target reader face to face with the reality of difference. This specific way of writing creates originality within translation, as the intention of post-colonial writers in this regard is not to serve the target reader in terms of smoothness and transparency, but their intent is to challenge the target reader by introducing him to a different world through his own language. Consequently, the translator will attain a translation characterized by hybridity.

Conclusion

Drawing on Ramanujan's perspective, the colonizer's language is seen as an outer form of expression which allows post-colonial writers to speak in the name of the locals. The colonial languages like French or English are referred to only as languages of expression to transpose the social interaction of local people and denounce the hegemonic practices of dominant forces. The originality of Indian English writers lies upon the usage of the colonial language to transpose the Indian cultural aspects.

Indian English writers when writing in English are in fact doing the job of a translator, for they must explain or draw attention to every specific cultural expression. The use of the colonizer's language can put an end to this debate between the two extremes. It can create a space "in between" which promotes communication between cultures and interaction among people from different regions. The cultural expressions that come to occupy the language of the colonizer do not only inform the target reader on the local culture, but they also challenge the standardized ways of using the colonizer's language. In doing so they declare their freedom from this linguistic occupation through possessing the language and using it as a tool to resist the cultural invasion exerted through language.

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Younes aich is an assistant professor at the faculty of Letters and Humanities, Chouaib Doukkali University, El Jadida. He completed his doctorate at the faculty of Humanities, Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah University on the subject of cultural translation. He is an active member of the Applied Language and Culture studies Lab (ALCS) based at Chouaib Doukkali University. His main research interests include cultural translation, media studies and post-colonial studies. He has published many articles in international journals. He has also presented papers at many national conferences.

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